The Influence of Christianity on Meiji and Taishō Literature and Beyond

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Introduction: Protestant Christianity and Modern Japanese Literature

The arrival of Protestant Christianity left an indelible mark on the historical and cultural developments of the Meiji and Taishō periods, and its importance in the intellectual landscape of turn-of-the century Japan cannot be overstated. The intersections between Christianity and literature were especially consequential: many canonical authors either converted or were deeply influenced by the religion during those years, and although virtually all of them eventually distanced themselves from the faith, Christianity shaped their worldview, informing their literary production in ways that are yet to be fully analyzed. From Kitamura Tōkoku's essays on the inner life and the early poems of Shimazaki Tōson to the metaphysical writings of Kunikida Doppo and the socialist novels of Kinoshita Naoe, on to the unconventional characters of Arishima Takeo's narrative and the thought-provoking *kirishitan mono* of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, the influence of Christianity can thus be detected throughout much of the modern literary canon, and yet, with the exception of Van Gessel and Mark Williams—two pioneers in the field who have written extensively on the subject – very little research has been published on this topic outside Japan thus far.[1] In Japan, by contrast, several studies have appeared since the 1960s that closely analyze the individual journey of faith of each of these Meiji and Taishō writers, but few scholars have to date ventured into an investigation of whether and how the Meiji Christian experience may have affected the developments that followed during the postwar period. As is known, the Bible features heavily in the narrative of the 1940s and 50s, and the fact that yet again a significant number of writers converted to Christianity after the war – for the most part Catholicism – raises legitimate questions as to the existence of possible links between the two periods.[2] The goal of this study is thus twofold: on the one hand to reaffirm the importance of Christianity's influence on the narrative of the modern period, and on the other to offer some preliminary observations on the existence of meaningful intersections on matters of literature and faith across the WWII divide.[3]

There are two important methodological premises to this inquiry. The first is the acknowledgment of the need to revisit the viability of the term "Christianity." The term has been used loosely by

scholars thus far, especially outside Japan.[4] However, the type of Christianity to which most Meiji and Taishō intellectuals were exposed was almost exclusively Protestant and mainly of Calvinist derivation, and it is therefore against that eschatology that the relationship between the religion and modern Japanese literature ought to be assessed. The realization of the primacy of Protestantism in the cultural and literary developments of the modern period is essential not only because it is key to a correct interpretation of the place of Christianity in Meiji literature, but also because it helps highlight, by contrast, the role played by Catholicism during the decades that followed. It would be very difficult to fully capture the influence of Christianity in Japanese literature without considering the dialectical relationship between the two religious systems. It is within the dynamics of their relationship that answers can likely be found to such questions as why the majority of writers who converted to Christianity immediately after the war were Catholic and whether, for example, there may exist a meaningful discursive continuum between the Christian experience of the two periods.

The second important premise is the realization that all the authors who engaged Christianity at the turn of the twentieth century did so against a common cultural and socio-political backdrop. As a result, their process of conversion was characterized by shared goals, doubts and experiences – be they their early infatuation with the world of politics, their discovery of romantic love, or, most importantly, the renunciation of the faith that invariably took place at some stage of their respective spiritual journey. This latter common experience – the fact that almost all of the authors who had embraced Christianity decided to distance themselves from it within the span of a few years – is not only a phenomenon that speaks of the complexities of the Meiji cultural and religious landscape, it is also a valuable interpretive key of the developments that followed. It is evidence at the very least that in spite of personal differences in matters of literary theory and practice – some of these authors considered themselves romanticists, other naturalists, others neither of the two – these young intellectuals shared a spiritual and epistemological predicament, and their common response to that predicament should be considered an essential aspect of modern Japanese literary history.

Certainly, explaining the reason for these writers' collective relinquishment of Christianity is not an easy task. Some scholars have seen the conflict between religion and literature – the inability to reconcile the dictates of Christian morality with the artist's desire to explore all aspects of human existence, including sexuality – as one of the main causes for this phenomenon. Others have attributed these writers' rejection of the religion to their alleged inability to fully understand the tenets of the faith. The fact, in particular, that some of these writers – Kitamura Tōkoku, Arishima Takeo and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke – took their own lives after years of intense engagement with the Christian religion has been seen as evidence of a superficial understanding of Christian theology.

The essays and diaries of many of these writers show however that their spiritual engagement was real and that their ultimate disavowal of Christianity was the outcome of a complex and painful journey. In fact, when examining each of these writers' experience, a shared theme stands out that cannot be dismissed and that seems to be closely linked to their collective relinquishment of the faith: the problem of sin.

The Problem of Sin

There is substantial evidence that the awareness of sin as explained by Meiji Protestantism fueled these writers' sense of iniquity in front of God, likely causing them to distance themselves from Christianity. The problem of sin was often a topic of reflection for many of these writers. Shiga Naoya, for example, once wrote:

> We had a Christmas meeting that evening and each of us had been asked to give a three-minute speech. I did not know what to talk about and I had been worrying about it since I had left the house. Finally, just when I was riding the train (this is the time that Sensei had moved to Kashiwagi, and trains were running all across the city), the sun came through from one direction and in that sunlight floated countless particles of dust. People were bothered by that dust, so much so that some of them even covered their mouths with handkerchiefs. However, those who were sitting at the opposite side of the carriage were breathing in that same dust seemingly without any problem, only because they were sitting in the shaded area of the train. I thought that the awareness of sin in Christianity must have been something similar. The important thing is to become free from it.[5]

Virtually all Meiji and Taishō authors experienced a strong sense of iniquity, which they believed prevented them from being saved. For example, in "Waga kako" (My Past), a piece that essentially sanctioned his separation from the Christian faith, Kunikida Doppo, who had been baptized on January 4, 1891 at the age of twenty by pastor and literary critic Uemura Masahisa, wrote:

> My past is made of day dreaming, evil, misery, and failure. Several years have passed since I embraced the teachings of Christ, his truth and life. . . . I am now twenty-five, and all this time I have just been living the life of a daydreamer. On a spiritual level the principles of Christianity have not guided me in any way . . . [I am] a Christian without Christ, without the Bible, an arrogant, servile, immoral, lazy, weak, selfish believer. I am definitely not a Christian.[6]

Masamune Hakuchō, who converted in 1897 and renounced his faith just a few years later, experienced the same strong concern regarding his ability to be a good Christian. A passage from his diary "Hatachi no nikki" (Diary of a Twenty-Year Old), written during the months that followed his conversion, reads as follows:

> March 13. . . . Went to church, listened to Uemura's sermon. . . . I was really impressed. . . .
> March 23. . . . Went to a prayer meeting straight from night school. . . . Self-admonishment: go to bed at about 9:30 p.m. and get up at 6 a.m., as soon as you wake up, study the Bible for an hour, do some physical exercise for two hours in the morning. . . . Do not talk behind people's back. Do not lie even if you have to die for it. Do not complain to people about your sufferings. Do not look at women. Do not spend a single cent on useless things. If you cannot keep these promises you are not worthy a human being. Fight! Life is not a place for entertainment; man was born to suffer. . . .
> March 27. . . . In the afternoon I went for a walk and then went to church. Uemura gave a sermon on John 3:3. . . .
> April 8. . . . Went to church in the evening and attended a prayer meeting in memory of our Savior's sufferings. Uemura gave a sermon on sin. . . . It fits my case perfectly. . . .
> April 9. . . . in the evening I attended a Bible lecture at the Sekiguchi Church. . . . April 17. . . . at church from 2:30 pm. Uemura gave a sermon on Luke 4:8. He explained that many in the world preach well, but do not behave accordingly. For them preaching is just a form of entertainment. I felt that this fits my case as well.[7]

In Arishima Takeo's case, these tensions escalated to even deeper and profound conflict. Immediately following his conversion in 1899, Arishima wrote repeatedly in his diary *Kansōroku* (A Record of My Thoughts) about his iniquity and inability to experience God. Over the years he became especially concerned with the question of free will – and with it the theory of predestination and the question of God's responsibility for the depravity of mankind. In his formal apostasy, which took place in 1917, he stated:

> If human beings are not granted free will, then they should not be able to be aware of their sins. Since they are still deemed responsible for their sins, there must be another force within them that is totally independent of the power of God. But that should not exist. If it does not exist, then who should be responsible for their sins? Man or God? Because of the very fact that

> I exist, that responsibility has to lie with God. If that is the case, then, what is the theory of atonement for? I could accept my grandmother's belief in some absolute power, but I thought that such a Christian teaching is either out of convenience or is simply flawed.[8]

Arishima believed that being unable to choose whether to sin or not signified that man was unable to earn salvation through his own agency.

Finally, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke – who technically never converted – also wrote extensively about Christianity and the problem of sin, and not many works like his *Haguruma* (Spinning Gears) of 1927 captured the sense of iniquity he experienced throughout his life. In this novel, after a number of bizarre encounters and ominous premonitions about his fate, the protagonist decides one day to go see an old friend – a fervent Christian – who might have an answer to his misfortunes: "Why had my mother gone mad? Why had my father's business failed? And why had I been punished?" The two then have the following exchange:

> "Drugs are not going to help, you know. Wouldn't you like to become a believer?"
> "Can even someone like me become one?"
> "There is nothing difficult about it. As long as you believe in God Christ his Son and Christ's miracles"
> "I can believe in the devil."
> "Then why not in God? If you truly believe in the shadow, you have to believe in the light as well, don't you think?"
> "There's such a thing as darkness without light, you know."
> "Darkness without light?"
> I could only fall silent. Like me, he too was walking through darkness, but he believed that if there is darkness there must be light. His logic and mine differed on this one point alone. Yet surely for me it would always be an unbridgeable gulf.[9]

The protagonist of *Haguruma* is unsure of whether he meets the standards that are required to be considered a Christian – hence his question "Can even someone like me become one?" He nonetheless would like to probe the possibility of being saved. However, prompted by the old man to believe, and being unable to do so, he eventually acknowledges "the unbridgeable gulf" between them.

As these few examples show, Meiji and Taishō writers shared a depth of introspection and a

concern for sin that was likely fueled by the type of Christianity to which they were exposed. As a number of scholars have stated over the years, it is as a rejection of what they perceived to be an oppressive Christianity that the modern self is said to have come into existence, and it is therefore appropriate to view the end result of that process as one the most important legacies of Christianity's intersections with modern literature. The influence of Christianity however extended well beyond the borders of Meiji and Taishō narrative, and the seeds of that influence can be found in *Seihō no hito* (The Man from the West), a work Akutagawa completed the night before his suicide in July 1927. In the opening passage, Akutagawa stated:

> About ten years ago, I was artistically in love with Christianity, especially Catholicism. Even today, I have a vivid memory of Japan's Temple of the Blessed Mother in Nagasaki. In a sense, I am no more than a crow picking away at the scattered crumbs left behind by Kitahara Hakushū and Kinoshita Mokutarō. Then, several years ago, I developed a certain fascination with Christians who had been martyred because of their Christianity. I took a pathological interest in the mentality of the martyr, which seemed to me just like the mentality of all fanatics. But then finally, in more recent days, I began to love the Christ as handed down to us in the four Gospels. Christ no longer strikes me as a stranger. For that, I will be ridiculed by today's youth, not to mention by Westerners. But I, having been born at the end of the nineteenth century, began to direct my eyes to the Cross, which they can no longer bear to look at and even dare to assault. My Christ, having been born in Japan, does not necessarily gaze upon the Sea of Galilee.[10]

Later, in the closing lines of the work, he wrote: "We are, just like the travelers on the road to Emmaus, unable to live without seeking Christ, who sets our hearts on fire." [11]

As is clear, Akutagawa's experience of Christianity changed so significantly over the years that at one point he began "to love the Christ as handed down to us in the four Gospels," and "Christ no longer [struck] him as a stranger." He thus became "unable to live without seeking Christ, who sets our hearts on fire." But a new focus on Christ was not the only change in his relationship with the Western religion. Mary also came to take on an important role in *Seihō no hito*, as can be evinced from the following passage:

> We sense a bit of Mary in all women. Perhaps in all men, too . . . In fact, one could say that we feel a bit of Mary in the fires burning in the hearth, or in the vegetables fresh from the field,

> or in an unglazed pot or a solidly built chair. Mary is not the one who is eternally feminine. She is the one who eternally protects us. After all, as the mother of Christ, Mary spent her life traversing the "vale of tears."[12]

Akutagawa emphasized in particular that:

> people have had to take lessons from Mary, more so than Christ, to find the way that leads to peace. Mary was but a woman who walked through this life with fortitude. (Catholicism has always held that the way to reach Christ runs through Mary. This is no mere coincidence. It is always risky in this life to try to reach Christ directly.)[13]

Akutagawa's lasting investment in Catholicism came to fruition at this juncture, as it is in these words that one can discern a concerted effort to go beyond the thematic borders of *Haguruma* – punishment and damnation – and outline a salvific discourse that shifted its focus from the fear of an irate God to the longing for a compassionate Christ and an interceding Mary. This was a significant shift from the Christian discourse of the preceding years that would have important ramifications for the literary developments that took place during the following decades. Notwithstanding, the Christian experiences of the Meiji and postwar period have been for the most part discussed separately by scholars thus far, and an investigation is still in order on the existence of meaningful intersections between them.

It must be noted, however, that in 1977, in a collection of essays titled *Shiina Rinzō to Endō Shūsaku* (Shiina Rinzō and Endō Shūsaku), discussing the legacy of Akutagawa's last work, Japanese scholar Sako Jun'ichirō briefly acknowledged the possibilities of such intersections. According to Sako, despite their conversion, no Meiji and Taishō writer had been able to write about "their Christ," and only after Akutagawa did, were other authors like Shiina Rinzō and Endō Shūsaku able to do the same.[14] Sako also acknowledged in this same piece the existence of both a Protestant and Catholic dimension in Akutagawa's thought, suggesting that whereas Dazai and Shiina inherited the Protestant side of it, Hori Tatsuo and Endō Shūsaku did so with the Catholic.[15] A few years later, in 1983, in an article titled "Kakekomi uttae' to 'Seihō no hito'" ("'Heed my Plea' and 'The Man from the West'"), Satō Yasumasa ratified this view, affirming the existence of two important trajectories linking Akutagawa to Hori and Endō on one side, and to Dazai and Shiina on the other.[16]

The Links between Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Hori Tatsuo

Although the direct connection between Akutagawa and Endō is admittedly already a fascinating one, as similarities between, for example, his well-known story "Kamigami no bishō" (The Smiles of the Gods) of 1922 and Endō's novel *Chinmoku* of 1966 are apparent, the links between Akutagawa and Hori are even more promising.[17] Hori was deeply influenced by Akutagawa – he wrote his graduation thesis on him – and the details of that influence are revealing of the evolution of Christian discourse in Japanese literature across the interwar years. In the opening passage of his thesis, for example, which was written in 1929, Hori first of all acknowledged the deep emotional attachment he felt towards his mentor: "Discussing Akutagawa is for me extremely difficult. The reason is that he is deeply rooted within me. In order for me to look at him objectively, I have to look at myself in the same way."[18] Akutagawa's presence in his life was still vivid – he added – and it was the very death of his teacher that had "opened his eyes." With respect to Akutagawa's *oeuvre*, Hori stated that, contrary to the majority of critics, he believed the best works to be the ones his mentor had written during the last year of his life, among them *Haguruma* – "his true masterpiece" – and *Seihō no hito*. In *Haguruma*, in particular, one could see the tragedy of a man in pain, being pushed to the limit, as he fights "that unknown something" that he feels is trying to take him down. It is at this time that believing himself to be in hell for the past sins he committed – Hori wrote – the man cries out to God for help. The exchange with the fervent Christian represented for Hori a key narrative moment in the character's spiritual journey: struggling to believe, and "although capable to believe in God's hatred," the protagonist of *Haguruma*, Hori concluded, was "ultimately unable to believe in his love."[19]

The ensuing discussion of *Seihō no hito* in the same thesis confirmed Hori's belief in this latter work's similarly highly consequential nature. A decade later, on January 25, 1940, Hori wrote a piece in the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* titled "Emao no tabibito" (The Travelers on the Road to Emmaus), in which he stated that just like the travelers did not realize to whom they were talking when they met Jesus, we also at times in our life journey do not realize we have just missed what we were searching for. Only now that Akutagawa was gone, he wrote, could he actually understand how his words moved us. Hori's short essay clearly underscored the lasting impact Akutagawa's last writings had on him and likely his contemporaries, and if Akutagawa's final words can be said to be the writer's own symbolic escape from Meiji Protestantism and concurrently a first meaningful shift towards Catholicism, it may be possible to assume that Hori, who never converted, inherited exactly those religious sensibilities.

Catholic sensibilities can in fact be found throughout Hori's literary production. During the 1930s

for example, Hori published several works, including his well-known “Kaze tachinu” (The Wind Has Risen) of 1936. In the final section of this story, following the death of his wife, the narrator returns to Karuizawa and passes in front of a church he had never seen. It is the now iconic St. Paul’s Catholic Church, and the scene of his first encounter with it is thought to be highly symbolic of Hori’s deep religious feelings:

> In the afternoon I went down from the hut and walked around the snow-covered village for the first time. I had known this town only from summer into fall. . . Walking along the road I used to like to walk on, the road with the waterwheel on it, I found that a small Catholic church had been built without my knowing it. The beautiful plain wooden structure, with already-blackened wooden siding under a snow-covered peaked roof, was a striking sight.[20]

The importance of St. Paul’s Catholic Church in Hori’s works is confirmed by his 1940 short story “Ki no jūjika” (The Wooden Cross). This piece narrates the events of a Sunday morning of September 1939, after Nazi Germany had invaded Poland. The protagonist attends Mass and witnesses the surreal atmosphere surrounding the foreign community, and the scene of two young Polish women arriving on their bicycles and then taking a seat not far from a young German boy and his family who are also attending Mass, is moving. Written in memory of his friend Tachihara Michizō who had just passed away the previous year, the story depicts the church as a mystical space that transcends the author’s curiosity and aesthetic appreciation for the exotic. As the protagonist reflects upon the ephemerality of life and longs for his friend who is now gone, the wooden church of St. Paul’s becomes the locus of personal experiences that delve deeply into the meaning of existence, the universality of faith, historicity, and the possibilities of a global religious community.

Even Hori’s last important work of fiction, “Yuki no ue no ashiato” (Footsteps in the snow), a piece of 1946, contained important religious elements that can be traced back to Akutagawa. The work unfolds as a conversation between a teacher (or master) and his student about Chekhov’s 1894 work “The Student.” The two read the passage of Peter’s denial of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke and wonder why and how this story and the one about the travelers to Emmaus that “the teacher had written in the past” – a reference to the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* piece that had been in turn inspired by Akutagawa and *Seihō no hito*’s final passage – continued to be so relevant as to still move us today.

Scholar Nagahama Takuma has recently noted that in a statement explaining the reasons why

in 1950 a collection of works by Hori received the Mainichi bunka Prize, the reviewer stated that although one could easily lose sight of the human spirit in the loudness of postwar literature, the beauty and serenity of Hori's works spoke exactly to the depth of that human spirit and as such, the statement read, they could be easily read as a literature of salvation.[21] To be sure, although most of Hori's literary works contained strong religious overtones, they were by no means exclusively Christian or Catholic. Some of his pieces evoked pantheistic sensibilities – the kind that could also be seen in such writers as Shimazaki Tōson and Kunikida Doppo – and Endō Shūsaku's debut piece "Kamigami to kami to" (God and the Gods) of 1947 would tackle exactly some of those sensibilities.

According to his wife Taeko, the author spoke often about the possibility of converting to the Catholic faith, and he once said to her that had she been Catholic, he would definitely have converted, too. He also spoke about the need to reach God through devotion to Mary, rather than Christ – something that was strongly reminiscent of Akutagawa's words – and he was also accordingly envious of his friend and poet Nomura Hideo who had at some point decided to become a Catholic.[22]

The Links between Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Dazai Osamu

Equally important and apparent are the links between Akutagawa and Dazai. Although the two seemingly met only once, Dazai admired Akutagawa and was deeply influenced by him.[23] "Nyoze gamon" (Thus I have heard), a piece Dazai wrote in 1948, a few months before he committed suicide, can be seen to epitomize not only the high relevance of the Christian message in his life – in this work he mentioned that his spiritual pain came almost entirely from Jesus' phrase "love thy neighbor as yourself" – but also the deep sympathy he felt for Akutagawa and his emotional agony. In a passage that has become emblematic of his feud with author Shiga Naoya, Dazai wrote:

> There is one more thing I dislike about you, and it is the fact that you don't understand Akutagawa's pain, which is the pain of he who lives in the shadow. Weakness. The Bible. Fear of life. The prayers of he who feels defeated. You don't understand any of these and you are even proud of it.[24]

Although researchers outside Japan have largely dismissed Dazai's frequent references to the Bible in his works, in Japan the amount of scholarship on the influence of Christianity in his *oeuvre* is beyond extensive.[25] Thus, literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō once stated that "one cannot understand Dazai without considering his relationship with the Bible," and writer Shiina Rinzō

similarly maintained the difficulty of grasping Dazai's essence as a writer without an understanding of the role of Christianity in his works.[26] Sako Jun'ichirō's statement that "the one who picked up the Bible from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's pillow is Dazai Osamu" – a reference to the Bible that was found by Akutagawa's bedside at the time of his death—is highly symbolic of the intricate connections between these two writers and their respective religious discourse.[27] There are however several other elements of similarity that deserve to be analyzed. In "Aru muchi" (A Whip), for example, of 1926, Akutagawa once wrote:

> As a boy I loved Christianity because of the stained-glass windows, the censers, and rosaries. Later, I became fascinated with the saints and the biographies of the Gospels. I felt psychologically and dramatically attracted to their resolve to risk their lives, and for this reason, too, I loved Christianity. In other words, as I loved Christianity, I also completely scorned it. But that was not as bad yet. Around 1922, I began to write short stories and aphorisms that ridiculed Christianity and the Christian faith, and I continued to use the solemn artistic heritage that accompanied the Christian religion as material for my stories. But in the end, as I looked down on it, I actually loved it. This may not be the only reason why I have been punished, but it is certainly one of them.[28]

The notion of having been punished for past sins is an important theme in *Haguruma*, too, and the main character of that novel, it will be recalled, decides one night to go visit an old friend who might have answers to his misfortunes. Like the protagonist of Akutagawa's story, Yōzō, the central character of Dazai's last novel *Ningen Shikkaku* (No Longer Human), is someone who, similarly "burdened with a pack of ten misfortunes," also believes he has been punished.[29] In the third notebook of the novel, when Shige-chan, the daughter of the woman with whom he is now living, asks him whether it is true that God will grant you anything if you pray for it, Yōzō thinks to himself that he for one would like to make such a prayer. Then, after answering that it is very possible that he would do so for her, he adds that he would definitely not for him because he had disobeyed his father. He then states:

> I was frightened even by God. I could not believe in His love, only in His punishment. Faith. That, I felt, was the act of facing the tribunal of justice with one's head bowed to receive the scourge of God. I could believe in hell, but it was impossible for me to believe in the existence of heaven.[30]

Not unlike the protagonist of *Haguruma* who, Hori Tatsuo also pointed out, could believe in the devil but not in God's love, Yōzō can also believe in hell, but not in God and his compassion. Both characters are thus terrified by God and his anger, sharing a sentiment that was not uncommon among Meiji and Taishō writers. For example, writing about his own experience, Masamune Hakuchō recalled viewing God as a cruel and irate being during his younger years, and in his famous essay "Chichi no shūkyō, haha no shūkyō: maria kannon ni tsuite" (Fatherly Religion and Motherly Religion: On Maria Kannon) of 1967 Endō Shūsaku capitalized on those recollections, characterizing such disproportionate fear of God as an unfortunate and enduring legacy of Meiji Christianity:

> When Masamune Hakuchō wrote "I believe God to be a terrifying God," he was not alone. When post-Meiji Japanese writers thought of God, the main image on their mind was that of a God who stood in judgment over their unconfessed sins and who punished them. As such, they came to look on Christianity, not as a religion of love and harmony, but as an oppressive religion. It is this one-sided interpretation, plus the view of Christianity as a Western religion, that has led to the predominantly negative view of Christianity since the Meiji era.[31]

The importance of Endō's realization cannot be overstated. In this same essay, the author of *Chinmoku* would go on to differentiate between Protestantism and Catholicism and stress the importance of Mary in the Catholic faith – something Akutagawa had also done – as an essential mediator between man and God. He thereby postulated the existence of a "motherly" religion ("haha no shūkyō") that in contrast to the fatherly religion ("chichi no shūkyō") of the Meiji Christian experience had the potential, it was implied, to better appeal to Japanese religious sensibilities. It is a dialectical climax in postwar religious discourse in which Endō constructed a new and more compassionate view of the Christian God, one that differed significantly from the vengeful image of the Meiji years.

Yōzō's perception of God is clearly indebted to that older Meiji view, namely of a "God who stood in judgment over their unconfessed sins and who punished them." Thus, like many other characters in Meiji and Taishō literature, Yōzō is deeply concerned with sin, but even by Meiji standards, his preoccupation with it is disproportionally intense. The apex of his concerns is reached when in the third notebook of the novel, he and his friend Horiki begin a guessing game of tragic and comic nouns which later morphs into a game of antonyms. Yōzō's question "What's the antonym of sin?" is in essence Dazai's own question, and the entire novel can be said to be an

attempt to answer this query. Yōzō, however, is unable to find a suitable answer: as Mark Williams points out, he "struggles desperately to find an antonym for the word." He "alights on various possibilities (including law, god, salvation, confession, repentance)," but "fails to arrive at the "orthodox" answer – that of forgiveness."[32] Indeed, the fact that the word "forgiveness" is missing is curious, if not strange, as this would seem a likely answer next to words like salvation, confession and repentance. But Yōzō's failure to think of this term is not unintentional; it is instead a deliberate omission on the part of Dazai who through such omission succeeds in underscoring the main fallacy of the Meiji Christian experience among the members of the *bundan*, namely its excessive emphasis on sin.

This omission leads in turn to another important realization: that the frequent reliance on the Bible seen in Dazai's works should not be considered a marginal aspect of this author's writing, but rather an organic element of his discourse that was deeply rooted in the Christian experience of the preceding decades. Accordingly, the term "forgiveness" becomes *in absentia* a clear signifier of the view of Christianity Dazai held, with the question of sin sitting squarely within that view. Yōzō feels in fact that if he "were able to find the antonym of sin, then [he] would be able to grasp the essence of it," and possibly, it is implied, of faith, and even God.

Although the protagonists of *Haguruma* and *Ningen shikkaku* are seemingly doomed and cannot be saved because they are unable to believe, those who believe – it can be inferred – will be. This is what the fervent Christian tells the protagonist of *Haguruma*. It is the one tenet that defines both Akutagawa's and Dazai's Christian experience, and it is around this truism of Meiji Protestantism that the tension between religion and literature unraveled over the following decades. Thus, in the chapter "Kamigami to kami to" that appeared in his volume "Katorikku sakka no mondai" (The Problems Confronting the Catholic Author) of 1954, Endō Shūsaku wrote:

> One is free to choose whether to accept or reject God. In other words, it is not possible in Catholicism to return to God without fighting Him. Here lies one of the greatest misunderstandings towards Catholicism: the notion that "since you have faith and therefore have been saved, it difficult for you to experience pain." A Catholic always has to fight. Against himself, against sin, against that devil that leads him to death, even against God.[33]

Endō's statement seems to suggest that believing is not necessarily equivalent to being automatically saved. The process of salvation is much more complex, it is implied, and although technically Endō did not necessarily make any distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism,

he did imply in this piece that the greatest misunderstanding towards Catholicism was that it was not (Meiji) Protestantism. "A Catholic always has to fight. Against himself, against sin, against that devil who leads him to death, even against God." Endō's words about salvation were a clear shift from Meiji mainstream salvific discourse that was once again successfully constructed by means of a contrastive approach to the tenets of Protestantism. Dazai's Christian experience moved between these borders – the fixed tenets of Meiji Christianity on one side and the more fluid contours of postwar Christian (or better Catholic) discourse. His experience is similarly key to an understanding of the evolution of Christian discourse in literature from Akutagawa to the writers of the 1940s and 50s.

Conclusion

As these preliminary observations have shown, the influence of Christianity on Japanese literature did not end with its demise among the intellectuals of the Taishō period. Debates on matters of art and faith continued to unfold during the inter- and postwar years, largely stemming from the experience of the previous decades. The conversion to Catholicism of a significant number of writers and the frequent reference to the Bible and the Christian religion in the narrative of the 1940s and beyond leaves no doubt as to the possibility of meaningful intersections between the two periods. Hori Tatsuo and Dazai Osamu are only two instances in which such continuity with the Christian discourse of the preceding years can easily be discerned.

Notes

1 See, for example, Van C. Gessel, "Voices in the Wilderness: Japanese Christian Authors," *Monumenta Nipponica* 37:4 (Winter 1982), 437-457, and Mark Williams, "From Out of the Depths: The Japanese Literary Response to Christianity," in John Breen and Mark Williams, eds., *Japan and Christianity: Impacts and Responses* (Houndmills and London; Macmillan, 1996). For a very recent study on the influence of Christianity in Meiji and Taishō literature, see my *The Dilemma of Faith in Modern Japanese Literature: Metaphors of Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

2 Among the authors who converted after the war, in addition to Endō Shūsaku who was baptized in the 1930s, see, for example, Ariyoshi Sawako (Catholic), Ogawa Kunio (Catholic), Mori Reiko (Protestant), Sono Ayako (Catholic), Shiina Rinzō (Protestant), Inoue Hisashi (Catholic), Moriuchi Toshio (Catholic), Tanaka Sumie (Catholic), Miura Ayako (Protestant), Shimao Toshio (Catholic) and Miura Shumon (Catholic). Authors whose works contain substantial references to the Bible and Christianity include Hori Tatsuo, Dazai Osamu, Ishikawa Jun, and Ōoka Shōhei.

3 For previous scholarship on postwar Christian authors, see, for example, Van C. Gessel's *The Sting of Life:*

Four Contemporary Japanese Novelists (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); "Endō Shūsaku: His Position(s) in Postwar Japanese Literature," *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 27:1 (April 1993), 67-74; "The Road to the River: The Fiction of Endō Shūsaku," in Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel, eds., *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japa*n (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 36-57; and "Silence on Opposite Shores: Critical Reactions to the Novel in Japan and the West," in Darren J.N. Middleton and Mark Dennis, eds., *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), 25-41. See also Mark Williams's *Endo Shusaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999); "Free to Write: Confronting the Present, and the Past, in Shiina Rinzō's Beautiful Woman," in Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams, eds., *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature: A Critical Approach* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); and "Writing the Traumatized Self: Tenkō in the Literature of Shiina Rinzō," in David Stahl and Mark Williams, eds., *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010). Other works include Philip Gabriel, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

4 One notable exception to this trend is Kevin Doak, *Xavier's Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2012).

5 Shiga Naoya, "Uchimura Kanzō sensei no omoide" (1941), in vol. 7 of Shiga Naoya zenshū (Iwanami shoten, 1974), 299.

6 Kunikida Doppo, "Waga kako," in vol. 9 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū* (Gakushū kenkyūsha, 1969), 342, 345.

7 Masamune Hakuchō, "Hatachi no nikki," in vol. 30 of *Masamune Hakuchō zenshū* (Fukutake shoten, 1986), 179-81.

8 "*Ribinguston den* jo," in vol. 7 of *Arishima Takeo zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1980), 371.

9 "Spinning Gears," in Jay Rubin, *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2006), 227. English translation slightly modified.

10 English translation in Kevin M. Doak and J. Scott Matthews, "'The Man from the West' and 'The Man from the West: The Sequel,'" *Monumenta Nipponica* 66:2 (2011), 257.

11 Ibid., 279.

12 Ibid., 258.

13 Ibid., 275.

14 Sako Jun'ichirō, *Shiina Rinzō to Endō Shūsaku* (Nihon kirisutokyōdan shuppankyoku, 1977), 17.

15 Ibid., 12.

16 Satō Yasumasa, "'Kakekomi uttae' to 'Seihō no hito,'" in vol. 5 of *Satō Yasumasa chosakushū* (Kanrin shobō, 1997), 70.

17 Endō stated that he had never read Akutagawa's story and that he came to know about it only after reading a piece by scholar Sako Jun'ichirō. See, for example, Endō Shūsaku and Miyoshi Yukio, "Taidan: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no uchi naru kami," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 17:16 (December

1972), 6. See also Sako Jun'ichirō, *Shiina Rinzō to Endō Shūsaku*, 185.

18 Hori Tatsuo, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ron: geijutsuka to shite no kare o ronzu," in vol. 4 of *Hori Tatsuo zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1978), 559.

19 Ibid., 605.

20 English translation in J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel, eds. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), vol. 1, 409.

21 Nagahama Takuma, "Hori Tatsuo 'Yuki no ue no ashiato' ron: sengo bungaku to kirisutokyō," *Kyōto Gaikokugo Daigaku kenkyū ronsō* 79 (2012), 223.

22 See Hori Taeko, "Bannen no Tatsuo," in Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō sōsho, ed., *Hori Tatsuo* (Yūseidō, 1971), 172.

23 Previous scholarship on this topic is copious. See, for example, Sōma Shōichi, *Dazai Osamu to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* (Shinbisha, 2010). On the possibility that Dazai may have met Akutagawa in 1927 on the occasion of a speech tour in Aomori, see Miyasaka Satoru, "Dazai Osamu to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 63:6 (1998), 49-51. On the similarities between the two authors, see also Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, "Dazai Osamu to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: mittsu no kyōtsūten o megutte," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 63:6 (1998), 32-37, and Nagahama Takuma, "Dazai Osamu: Dazai no Akutagawa juyō o chūshin to shite," in Miyasaka Satoru ed., *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to kirishitan mono: tasei, kōsa, ekkyō* (Kanrin shobō, 2014), 419-29.

24 In vol. 10 of *Dazai Osamu zenshū*, (Chikuma shobō, 1971), 325-26.

25 See, for example, the limited attention paid to this topic in the three seminal works, James A. O'Brien, *Dazai Osamu* (Boston: Twayne Publisher, 1975); Phyllis I. Lyons, *The Saga of Dazai Osamu: A Critical Study with Translations* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1985); and Alan Wolfe, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

26 See Kamei Katsuichirō, *Dazai Osamu* (Kadokawa shoten, 1959), 18; and Shiina Rinzō, "Jo," in Saitō Suehiro, *Dazai Osamu to Shiina Rinzō* (Ryokuchisha, 1973), 1.

27 Quoted in Satō Yasumasa, "'Kakekomi uttae' to 'Seihō no hito'," 68.

28 In vol. 23 of *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū* (Iwanami shoten, 1998), 221-22.

29 Dazai Osamu, *No Longer Human*, English translation by Donald Keene (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1958), 25.

30 Ibid., 117.

31 English translation in Mark Williams, "Bridging the Divide: Writing Christian Faith (and Doubt) in Modern Japan," in Mark R. Mullins ed., *Handbook of Christianity in Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 309.

32 Ibid., 310.

33 In vol. 12 of *Endō Shūsaku bungaku zenshū* (Shinchōsha, 2000), 23.